

BOOK REVIEW

ANNE HUTCHINGS, and ALAN HAXTON SCOTT, GILLIAN LEWIS, and ANTHONY CUNNINGHAM. 1996. **Zulu Medicinal Plants: An Inventory.** (ISBN 0-86980-893-1, pbk; ISBN 0-86980-923-7, hbk). University of Natal Press, Private Bag X01, Scottsville 3209, Republic of South Africa, in association with University of Zululand and National Botanical Institute. Exclusive distributor: International Specialized Book Services, Inc., 5804 N.E. Hassalo Street, Portland, OR 97213-3644, U.S.A. (503) 287-3093; FAX (503) 280-8832. \$110.00. 450 pp.

The subtitle understates the amount of information in this tightly organized compendium of information about plant used by Zulu traditional healers. The authors have chosen to arrange their entries in phylogenetic order to facilitate comparisons between related plants. As this publication deals exclusively with plants of southern Africa, the classification follows that used in the National Herbarium. Genus numbers reflect the standards used in herbaria arranged in the Englerian system with additional standards for ferns and grasses. These are referenced in the introduction.

The entry for each species includes geographical distribution, a short description, local names in English, Afrikaans and Zulu followed by documented use by Zulu healers and then those referring to use by other groups in southern Africa. Physiological effects, Chemical constituents and biological properties are added where information is available. These gaps will tease and stimulate further research conducted, it is hoped, under the ethical and legal codes protecting intellectual property rights.

There is a wealth of information not only on the medicinal uses of these plants, but by the social and cultural uses too. These range from love potions to charms against lightning and incense to invoke the goodwill of ancestors. However, the authors do warn readers not to experiment!

For those who do not own a copy of Watt and Breyer-Brandwijk's 1962 edition *the Medicinal and Poisonous plants of Southern and Eastern Africa* this book is a must. For those fortunate to own a copy this will be a valuable supplement, for at least a third of the 1032 species mentioned here are new.

With the worldwide renewal of interest in natural products this book has a huge potential readership. In each foreword, we are reminded of the value, and ephemeral nature, of traditional knowledge. This book makes it less likely we will lose the traditional ethnobotanical knowledge of the Zulu nation.—*Fiona Norris*